

## Sufi Reform and the Mystical Ideology of Divine Unity

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### Abstract

*Referring to theoretical, practical and institutional transformation in Sufism during the eighteenth century, the concept of Sufi reform has prompted much debate in recent scholarly literature. Concentrating on the Indian subcontinent after the late sixteenth century, this paper ventures to reveal a confusion, among both those who affirm the occurrence of such Sufi reform and those who refute it, between the two notions of waḥdat al-wujūd (“Unity of Being”) and hama ūst (“Everything is He”). The former notion originated in the thought of the medieval Sufi, Ibn al-‘Arabi (d. 1240), while the latter was primarily an Indian response to the former concept. Through analyzing the semantics of these two notions within the context of Indian Sufism, the current paper argues that what is criticized by Sufi reformists from the seventeenth century onwards was not exactly the doctrine of the Unity of Being, as it had been formulated by Ibn al-‘Arabi and his commentators, but rather, it was the Indian reception of it represented in the idea of hama ūst. Accordingly, it is argued that reference to the continuity of the idea of waḥdat al-wujūd in the modern era by the opponents of the appearance of a Sufi reformism in the eighteenth century cannot adequately justify their position.*

### I. Introduction

The subject of Sufi reform in the eighteenth century has been a controversial issue in academia for several decades. On one side, most historians have considered the thirteenth century, or fifteenth at best, to have heralded the end of the history of Sufism, classifying the periods that followed as the time of Sufi decline, which lacks any noticeable change in Sufism.<sup>1</sup> Some scholars, such as Bernd Radtke and R. S. O’Fahey, also emphasize the continuity of Sufi doctrines,

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practices, and institutions in the eighteenth century while denying the occurrence of any Sufi reformism during that specific period.<sup>2</sup> On the other side, scholars such as Fazlur Rahman and Reinhard Schulze advocate the idea that a transformation occurred in Sufism in the eighteenth century, and attempt to substantiate their claim through demonstrating the considerable alteration to various features of Sufism in that time.<sup>3</sup> Among features these scholars generally refer to, significant are: 1– placing emphasis on union with the spirit of the Prophet Muhammad and communing with him by means of mystical techniques such as the recitation of the *taṣliya*, a supererogatory formula supplicating for blessings to be bestowed upon the Prophet, with a general stress on the Muhammadan Way (*Ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya*);<sup>4</sup> 2– denouncing popular ecstatic Sufi practices like mystical dance, remembrance of God through vocalized recitation (*dhikr-i jalīl*), saint worship, and the visitation of saints' tombs; 3– accentuating the importance of a moral life and social responsibilities; and 4– criticizing the mystical principles of the influential medieval Sufi from Andalusia, Ibn al-ʿArabi (d.1240), and in particular, his doctrine of the Unity of Being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*).<sup>5</sup>

This paper attempts to enter this debate through a reconsideration of the last item among these features, i.e., the criticism of the theory of *waḥdat al-wujūd* by Sufi reformers. It argues that what is criticized by these reformers was not exactly the doctrine of the Unity of Being, as it had been formulated by Ibn al-ʿArabi and his major commentators, but rather, the Indian response to that doctrine, i.e. the idea of *hama ūst* (Persian, “Everything is He”).<sup>6</sup> In the doctrine of *hama ūst*, the distinction between God and all of His creation, including humankind, becomes excessively blurred, and since both God and his manifestations share existence (*wujūd*), they both deserve to be recognized as divine. This idea, which was constructed upon Ibn al-ʿArabi's doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, was supported and fortified by the syncretic, shared tradition that took shape in India as a result of the contact and association of Sufism with various indigenous religious currents, including Hinduism and the yogic way of life, that hoisted the banner of unity and shattered the borders between Indian religions and Islam.

The conceptual confusion between *waḥdat al-wujūd* and *hama ūst* has caused serious misunderstandings on both sides of the abovementioned scholarly positions, which debate the existence of a Sufi reform in the eighteenth century, and taking the distinction between these two concepts into account is highly beneficial in analyzing the roots of the emergence of Sufi reform in a more accurate way. In the debate on the occurrence of such a Sufi reform, the proponents ascribe the characteristic of criticizing the notion of *waḥdat al-wujūd* to Sufi reform, considering all critiques of Sufi reformists against undifferentiated mystical unity as their objection to the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. They are correct in considering the critique of the idea of unity as an indicator of a transformation in eighteenth century Sufism, since such a doctrine and its consequences were severely criticized by several Sufi reformists, yet they fail to distinguish between two distinct forms of unity, those being *waḥdat al-wujūd* and *hama ūst*. The opponents, on the other side, argue that the notion of the Unity of Being is identical for both modern and medieval Sufis, and, hence, there is not enough evidence to support the idea of transformation and reform in the Sufism of the modern era regarding this notion. They are also accurate with respect to their having been a kind of continuity in Sufism regarding the concept of the Unity of Being from medieval up until modern time, but they ignore the opposition of Sufi reformists towards the idea of divine unity in the sense of *hama ūst*, which was the response of Indian Muslims to, and a remarkable consequence of, Ibn al-‘Arabi’s doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. In what follows, I will argue on behalf of considering Sufi reform to be a reaction to the Hindu-Muslim shared tradition based on *hama ūst*, after describing Ibn al-‘Arabi’s idea of the Unity of Being, its traces among various Indian Sufi orders, as well as the response of Indian Muslims to this idea. On this basis, I will illustrate that reference to the continuity of the idea of *waḥdat al-wujūd* in modern time by opponents of the idea of their having been an emergence of a Sufi reformism in the eighteenth century is insufficient to justify their claim.

## **II. Ibn al-‘Arabi’s *waḥdat al-wujūd* and its traces in Indian Sufism:**

Ibn al-‘Arabi is known as the progenitor of the school of *waḥdat al-wujūd* though he himself did not employ the term in his own works.<sup>7</sup>

The idea of the Unity of Being has its roots, on one hand, in a long-term debate in the context of Islamic theology (*kalām*) over the question of whether scriptural references to the anthropomorphic attributes of God are literal or figurative, and on the other, in the discourse of *jamālī* versus *jalālī* names of God in the context of Sufism. In Islamic theology, traditionalists such as the Ash‘arites affirmed, in direct opposition to the Mu‘tazilites, the literal sense of anthropomorphic Qur’ānic references, such as those mentioning God’s “face,” “hands” and “eyes.” Criticizing the idea of God’s similarity (*tashbīh*) to creation as a heretical position, rational theologians held that terms such as hands, eyes, feet, laughter, and so forth, should by no means be considered similar to what is designated by the same terms for humankind.<sup>8</sup> In Islamic mysticism, divine similarity associates with the divine name of *jamāl* (beauty), which is more harmonious with and is emphasized in the ecstatic-unitive type of Sufism. *Tashbīh* indicates that God’s signs within the cosmos designate His attributes of life, knowledge, desire, mercy, generosity, and provision, the attributes which are also found in created things. Contrary to this perspective, the idea of God’s incomparability (*tanzīh*) with creatures is associated with the name of *jalāl* (majesty), which affirms God’s purity and transcendence above all the defects and imperfections of creation—in Qur’ānic words, “Nothing is like Him” (al-Qur’ān 42:11). *Tanzīh* is an assertion of God’s essential and absolute incomparability with any created thing, and His existence above all creaturely attributes.<sup>9</sup>

Ibn al-‘Arabi propounded the idea of *waḥdat al-wujūd* in order to suggest a solution for this old theological quandary regarding God’s similarity to, yet His incomparability with His creation. His approach regarding this problem is to collect both aspects of *tashbīh* and *tanzīh* by way of propounding a theory which contains both similarity and incomparability in a single, cohesive way, based on mystical experience and the intuitional knowledge achieved through experiencing a taste (*dhawq*) of the divine, contrary to the rational knowledge attained by reason. *Waḥdat al-wujūd*, literally meaning, “Unity of Being,” was Ibn al-‘Arabi’s proposal for the question of a relationship between the Creator and the creation that was: Are the things the same as God in

their being and existence? In other words, if there is just one unique existence, is it possible to ascribe, to this existence, all multiple existents as well? Ibn al-‘Arabi’s answer to this question was that things are the same as God in one respect and yet different from Him in another respect and the things are both He and not He..<sup>10</sup> Being is the very divine essence (*‘ayn al-dhāt al-ilāhiyya*), but for the creatures, including humankind’s being, it is a loan from the Divine. Thus things do not own their being independently and are considered relative, possible (*mumkin*) nonexistence..<sup>11</sup> However they possess a kind of relative existence as objects of God’s knowledge before their appearance in the world as existent entities..<sup>12</sup> In this connection, Ibn al-‘Arabi describes the Absolute Reality (*al-Ḥaqq*) in its primordial absoluteness as *ankar al-nakirāt* (“the most unknown of all unknown”), absolute mystery (*ghayb muṭlaq*), and the endless darkness (*‘ama’*) which is not the subject matter of any knowledge in its pristine transcendence. This Absolute Reality, yet, manifested into the realm of oneness of many (*wāḥidiyya*) and could be known in the level of His *Theophanous* (*tajalliyāt*)..<sup>13</sup>

The ideas of Ibn al-‘Arabi, especially his Unity of being, have been a key source of inspiration to Muslims in general and Sufis in particular for centuries from the thirteenth century onwards. This was primarily due to commentaries on his works written by his followers in both prose and poetry, and also the continuous preaching of his ideas in many sectors of the Muslim community. Michel Chodkiewicz believes that one of the main reasons for the popularity of the Greatest Master (*al-Shaykh al-Akbar*) was that his work enjoys a distinguishing characteristic in comparison with all of the preceding works, that “it has an answer for everything.”..<sup>14</sup> Although Ibn al-‘Arabi’s *œuvre* is in Arabic, the principal centers for propagating his viewpoints were in Iran, Central Asia, Turkey and India..<sup>15</sup> In the case of India, this region experienced, shortly after the death of Ibn al-‘Arabi, the mystical influx and influence of the Chishtiyya Sufi order, for which the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* became a major theoretical source..<sup>16</sup> This order has been the most widespread Sufi order in South Asia since Muin al-Din Chishti (d.1236), who was responsible for its introduction to the Subcontinent, settled in Ajmer at the end of the twelfth century..<sup>17</sup>

Muin al-Din and other figures of the Chishtiyya such as Quṭb al-Din Bahkhtiyar Kaki (d.1235), Farid al-Din Ganjshakar (d.1266), Nizam ad-Din Awliya (d.1325), and ‘Abd al-Quddus Gangohi (d.1537).<sup>18</sup> played important roles in propagating Ibn al-‘Arabi’s teachings in what would become, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

The doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, as expounded by Ibn al-‘Arabi, had become popular, not only among Chishtiyya Sufis, but also among other Sufi orders, with exponents such as the Qadiri saints of India and the Naqshbandi shaykhs of the sixteenth century.<sup>19</sup> The Qadiriyya Sufi order entered and gained popularity in India. Thanks to the efforts of Miyan Mir Qadiri (d.1636),<sup>20</sup> who engaged himself with the study of the *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* of Ibn al-‘Arabi, especially with its commentary by ‘Abd al-Rahman Jami.<sup>21</sup> Though being the preeminent pioneers of Sufi reform in the Indian Subcontinent, the Naqshbandiyya was also among the foremost Sufi orders which played a significant role in transference of the ideas of the Greatest Master to India, and a great number of Indian Muslims were initially exposed to such ideas through the works of Naqshbandi masters. The earliest representative of the Naqshbandiyya in India, Khwaja Baqi Billah (d.1603) displayed an enthusiastic interest in Ibn al-‘Arabi, as his various poetical works, primarily his *Mathnawīs*, are replete with themes derived mostly from the Andalusian master.<sup>22</sup>

### III. Response of Indian Sufis to *waḥdat al-wujūd*

Contrary to the pre-Ibn al-‘Arabi Islamic theology which, predominantly, overemphasized the *tanzīh* perspective, regarding the relationship of God with creation, in the Indian environment, the response to *waḥdat al-wujūd* has exhibited an extreme overemphasis on *tashbīh* for centuries. Indians were more interested in those consequences of the Unity of Being which were related to the concept of God’s descent due to his love for man. According to these consequences, God descends to humankind to joyfully welcome him when he turns to God, to rejoice at his repentance after his turning away from Him, and to be his deputy in his hunger, thirst, and illness.<sup>23</sup> Indian Sufis were much interested in attaining the knowledge of the similarity of God with humankind through tasting. Overemphasizing *tashbīh* and its consequences, Indian Muslims mostly

paid little attention to another aspect, that of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, that is the *tanzīh* perspective, and consequently, they underestimated the distinction between creator, creation and divine transcendence. This overemphasis, which was combined with the cultural and religious interactions that began long before the presence of Ibn al-‘Arabi’s thought in India, led to construction of the notion of *hama ūst*. Muhammad Ashraf Jahangir Simnani (d.1425), a pivotal personality in the advancement of the Chishtiyya Sufi order in India, was among the first who popularized the use of the term *hama ūst*. In interpreting the idea of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, Simnani emphasized that anything other than God does not exist. He underestimated, consequently, the notion of the relevant existence of creatures through pure Being, and disregarded the distinction between God and creation through the quiddity of things.<sup>24</sup> Due to the employment of such an attitude by Sufi masters like Simnani, the way was paved for the distribution of the pantheistic idea of *hama ūst* in the Indian Subcontinent.

In this context, the concept of *hama ūst* was considered by Indian Muslims to be the representative of the *tashbīh* perspective, juxtaposed with the *tanzīh* viewpoint, which was both nourished from and caused the production of, the fertile interaction between Islam and autochthonous Indian culture. Therefore, on the one hand, the elimination of the distance between the Creator and creation based on *hama ūst* led to the elimination of the borders between Indian religions and Islam and likewise, led to the construction of a shared tradition, which was not tolerated by *tanzīhī* movements among Muslims. On the other, due to the continuous communication between Muslims and Hindus, Muslims confronted parallels to the idea of *waḥdat al-wujūd* in its *tashbīhī* side within Hinduism, and this led to a further development of *hama ūst* within Indian Sufism.<sup>25</sup> The dialogue between Sufis and Hindus through personal meetings and contact, particularly in *khanaqāhs* and through reading each other’s works has caused a long-term reciprocal interaction that has played an integral role in the transformation of the idea of *waḥdat al-wujūd* to a pantheistic interpretation of *hama ūst*, wherein multiplicity advanced to the margins and unity was thereby emboldened. One example of this interaction is the dialogue that occurred between Hindu yogis and Sufis

at the *khanaqāh* of Shaykh Ahmad ‘Abd al-Haqq (d.1434), considered a sort of clearing house for Hindu Yogis and Sanyasis. Such a syncretic attitude resulted in a broader interaction between divergent religious sects and a mutual understanding of various thoughts and practices, as reflected in the poetry of the Indian poet-saint Kabir (d. 1518) about the identity of *Ram* and *Rahman* and the coalescence of Hari and *Ḥaḍrat*, Krishna and *karāmat*, and Mahadeva and Muhammad..<sup>26</sup> Also, ‘Abd al-Quddus Gangohi, the eminent Sabiri Sufi associated with the *khanaqāh* of Shaykh Ahmad ‘Abd al-Haqq, wrote a treatise on unity entitled *Rushd Nama*, in which he identified Sufi beliefs with the philosophy and practices of the Hindu Yogi, Gorakhnath..<sup>27</sup>

#### **IV. Sufi Contributions to the establishment of a shared tradition:**

Among the various Sufi orders of India, the Chishtiyya played a pivotal role in opening the doors of interaction with non-Muslims, and it was of paramount importance in the establishment of a shared tradition based on the ideology of *hama ūst*. Chishti saints, speaking the language of the common people, gave impetus to linguistic and cultural assimilation. Their non-dogmatic attitude towards Islamic rituals and ceremonies as well as their propounding of new interpretations to these rituals are some of the Chishtiyya standards which led to such an establishment. Considering the highest level of prayer equivalent to removal of distress among those who live in hardship, Chishti masters allowed all types of people, with different religious backgrounds and beliefs, to visit their hospices, called *jamā‘at khāna*. They not only showed tolerance towards followers of religions other than Islam, but they themselves, also began interacting with the non-Islamic teachings of native Indians. Nasir al-Din Chirāq (d.1356), among the most important leaders of the Chishtiyya, followed the special breathing techniques of the Hindus, while Nizam al-Din Awliya adopted yogic practices, and Farid al-Din Ganjshakar practiced austerity like a Sanyasi. Other important figures of this Sufi order such as Hamid al-Din Nagawri (d.1276) and Qutb al-Din Bahktiyar Kaki also further contributed in fortifying a Muslim-Hindu shared tradition..<sup>28</sup>

As a result of the encounter between Indian Sufis and Hindu culture, many practices such as shaving the heads of novice initiates, bowing



before the Shaykh, offering water to visitors, audition gatherings, and penances performed while hanging inverted by a rope attached to the foot (*chilla-i ma'kūsa*).<sup>29</sup> were borrowed from the local Hindus by not only Chishti Sufis, but also the members of other Sufi orders in India..<sup>30</sup> Many Sufis discussed ideological and philosophical themes with Indian mystics and ascetics, including Yogis and Bhaktas, and through their interaction developed a common basis for their understanding of notions related to ultimate Reality and Existence. Translating the famous Siddha treatise *Amrita-Kunda* on *Hatha-Yoga* principles into Arabic, and then into Persian, by Muslims as early as the thirteenth century is one of the results of these discourses..<sup>31</sup>

The popularity of Hindu themes in Hindi/Hindavi poetry composed by Sufis was particularly remarkable progress in Indian Sufi literature. Most of these verses and songs recited at early *samā'* gatherings have been lost, however, a few of the surviving verses, ascribed to Sufis such as the abovementioned Hamid al-Din Nagawri and Farid al-Din Ganjshakar, witness the contribution of these poetries to constructing the shared tradition in India..<sup>32</sup> The combination of Sufi beliefs with those expressed by Lalla (d.1392), a Kashmiri Shaivite mystic and poet, throughout his poetry known as the *Lalla-Vakyani* (*Wise Saying of Lalla*).<sup>33</sup> led to the founding of the Rishi Sufi order in Kashmir. This order was established by Nur al-Din Rishi (d.1438), a vegetarian Shaykh who gained nourishment from wild vegetables and leaves and lived in a cave in the village of Kaimuh near Srinagar..<sup>34</sup> Rishi was seemingly inspired in his Kashmiri verses by Lalla, whose poetry includes, in several cases, the same theme as in Rishi's poems, and such a form of poetry evoked a strong effect not only on Rishi Sufis but also on many other Sufis local to the territory. Also, Abdul Hakim of Svandvip (d.1690), a Bengali poet who wrote of the esoteric chakras in his lengthy, *Chari-Maqamer Bhed*, identified the chakras of the Nath yogis with the interior mystical stations of Sufism..<sup>35</sup>

#### **V. Reaction of Sufi reformists to *hama ūst***

Besides its fertile cultural, religious and literary works, the Sufi-Hindu shared tradition led to the establishment of certain new Sufi (sub-) orders, behaviors, theories and practices among masses, which could not be easily regarded as Islamic by orthodox-oriented Sufis. At a more

popular level, Sufi orders and sub-orders related to this shared tradition absorbed a great number of local Hindu features. A branch of the Rifā'i order called the Gurzmars, for example, inflicted wounds upon themselves with maces, while Jalali Sufis ate snakes and scorpions and consumed hashish and considered sexual promiscuity with female members of the order permissible for their masters. The Qalandars, who were famous for shaving their heads, beards and mustaches, sometimes roamed naked and used intoxicants. The Madaris rubbed ash on their bodies, and the Haidaris adorned themselves with iron necklaces and bracelets. As with a number of other "heterodox" orders that developed outside of India, these influenced Sufi orders and sub-orders and paid little care to regular Islamic rituals.<sup>36</sup> These Sufi customs and many other non-Islamic styles of worship, religious fests and rituals adopted by Muslims are indicators of the prevalence of non-orthodox, and in several cases, anti-Shari'a styles of life among a wide range of Indian Muslims, who were influenced by a culture based on the ideology of *hama ūst*.<sup>37</sup>

This violation of Islamic norms and the absorption of anti-Islamic features made those Sufi saints belonging to the line of orthodox-oriented Sufism, react strongly against them. Sufi reformists considered the idea of *hama ūst* to be the root of all these ideas and practices, which, according to them, was responsible for all of the amalgamation and syncretism that endangered the "true Islam." They felt an emergency activity to be done, and, hence, encouraged Muslims to participate in this urgent reformist activity. The preeminent Sufi reformer, Ahmad Sirhindi (d.1624), tried to propound a remedy through Sufism itself by means of touching the central idea of unity in Sufism. In his works, though using the expression of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, what he targets and criticizes is, in fact, the very idea of *hama ūst*. Sirhindi claimed a new stratum of mystical states and stages for his own in which *waḥdat al-wujūd* had only been an experience at a lower stage of mystical perfection than the other two higher stages of shadow-ness (*Ẓilliyyat*) and servanthood (*'abdiyyat*). He asserted that according to his experience in the stage of *Ẓilliyyat*, humankind and the whole world was shadow and in the highest stage of *'abdiyyat*, God and creation, especially humankind, were completely separated.<sup>38</sup> Accordingly, the

core of mystical experiences in the time of Sufi reform, starting from around the beginning of the seventeenth century, became a container to confirm and defend the distinction and incomparability of God and man, a radical belief against the idea of *hama ūst*. Sirhindi, time and again, referred to the three stages of his mystical experience, i.e., the unity, shadow-ness, and servanthood, by which he attempted to convince the Sufis of his time that there are higher stages of mystical experience than unity, wherein the mystic is not identical with God, the world is absolutely distinguished from God, and man is simply a creature and a servant. In reaction to eliminating the borders between Islam and Hinduism, Sirhindi emphasized the differences between the two religions and their lacking the potential for coexistence..<sup>39</sup>

Discussing the grounds of polytheism (*shirk*) in detail, Sufi reformists went so far as to categorize the beliefs and behaviors of some Sufis, and also non-Sufi Muslims, under the title of polytheism. To avoid Muslims from *shirk*, they initiated discourses regarding the process of Indian perversion from *tawhīd* to *shirk* in the course of time and warned Muslims not to succumb to the same pitfall of becoming polytheistic like the Hindus. Shah Waliullah of Delhi (d.1762), who was a Sufi reformist in addition to being a known Muslim scholar, elaborately set forth the subject of *shirk*..<sup>40</sup> He continued to oppose having a shared tradition with Hinduism, and, in line with Sirhindi, opposed compromises with non-Islamic practices, accusing Sufi masters of encouraging idolatry among Muslims..<sup>41</sup> Mirza Mazhar Jan-i Janan (d.1781), a Sufi reformer and founder of the Mazhariyya Shamsiyya sub-order of the Naqshbandiyya, even asserted that the behavior of Sufis in relation to saints leads to idolatry, and Sufi meditation with the form of the Shaykh in mind (*rābiṭa*) resembles certain polytheistic Hindu practices..<sup>42</sup> Sufi reformists in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries warned their disciples that Sufis are only allowed to speak of unity and peace while in the state of intoxication (*sukr*), and if they speak in the same way while being sober, they are seeking to destroy distinctions between good and evil and are thereby, heretics and infidels..<sup>43</sup> In this way, Sufi reformists encouraged Sufis to emphasize the distinction, be it between Muslims

and non-Muslims or between God and creation, instead of the syncretic and unitive attitude found in *hama ūst*.

One of the most significant reformist figures in the eighteenth century India is Khwaja Mir Dard of Delhi (d.1785), who is considered a theoretician of the *Ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya* in India established by his father Muhammad Nasir ‘Andalib (d.1759). Khwaja Mir Dard clearly makes distinction between the ideas of *waḥdat al-wujūd* and *hama ūst*. At the same time as he respects Ibn al-‘Arabi’s doctrine of the Unity of Being, he severely criticizes and attacks those Muslims who live a life based on the ideology of *hama ūst*.<sup>44</sup> In this regard, his reaction to the Muslim-Hindu shared tradition and the idea of *hama ūst* differs from that of not only certain earlier Sufi reformists such as Sirhindi, but also reformists contemporary to him like Shah Waliullah. In section 104 of his masterpiece *‘Ilm al-Kitāb*, he attempts to systematize his theory of unity based on reconciling both the positions of Ibn al-‘Arabi and Sirhindi. According to him, in Ibn al-‘Arabi’s time, most Islamic theologians along with the Muslim masses, ignored the idea of *tashbīh* and *waḥdat* (“unity”), and grasped to the ontological perspective of *tanzīh* and distinction. Ibn al-‘Arabi’s teachings were an attempt to bring Muslims back from intense belief in *tanzīh* to the delicate realm of *tashbīh*, and his emphasis on *tashbīh*, was due to the circumstances of his time which demanded such accentuation. However, Mir Dard explains that in the time of Sirhindi, contrary to Ibn al-‘Arabi’s era, Indian Muslims were drowned in the idea of *hama ūst* and, therefore, Sirhindi emphasized *tanzīh* and propagated the doctrine of “everything is from him” (*hama az ūst*) or “unity of witnessing” (*waḥdat al-shuhūd*) instead of *waḥdat al-wujūd* in the sense of *hama ūst*.<sup>45</sup> Mir Dard’s alternative suggestion for these two schools of *wujūdī* and *shuhūdī* is nothing other than the Muhammadan Way, which endeavors to recombine these two trends, in the same manner that they were joined in the beginning of Islam, in the idea of *tawḥīd* brought forth by the Prophet.<sup>46</sup> He criticizes certain aspects of both the idea of *hama ūst* as well as the reaction of Sufi reformists to this idea, attempting to formulate his own position in a chain of expressions corresponding more to the literature of orthodox Islam than to that of Sufism. He puts forward the theory of a “total Muhammadan unity” (*tawḥīd-i kullī-i*

*muḥammadi*) instead of juxtaposed pairs of *hama ūst* vs. *hama az ūst* and *waḥdat al-wujūd* vs. *waḥdat al-shuhūd*, in which the mystic is able to see (*mushāhada*) God is the mirror of creatures, while he remains in the stage of servanthood (*‘abdiyyat*).<sup>47</sup>

The above brief survey regarding the history of the idea of *waḥdat al-wujūd* in the Indian context up until the time of the Sufi reformists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries shows that the approach of significant Indian Sufi reformists towards this doctrine has not been one of hostility to this idea, but rather one of the rejection of, and of an assault on the phenomenon of Muslim-Hindu shared tradition in the form of the ideology of *hama ūst*. Accordingly, the arguments set forth by opponents of the idea that there had been an occurrence of Sufi reform in the eighteenth century on the basis of the continuity of the idea of *waḥdat al-wujūd* in that century seems insufficiently justified, as it fails to pay due attention to the distinction between the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* itself and the Indian *tashbīhī* response to it in the form of *hama ūst*.

## Endnotes and References

\* This paper is based on a doctoral dissertation entitled “Sufi Reform in Eighteenth Century India: The Case Study of Khwaja Mir Dard Dihlawi,” written at the University of Erfurt, Germany.

<sup>1</sup> The author of the first concise history of Sufism, A. J. Arberry, for example, speaks of “the history of the decline” in Sufism after the thirteenth century as a general pattern. See A. J. Arberry, *Sufism, An Account of The Mystics of Islam* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1950), 119.

<sup>2</sup> See, among others, Bernd Radtke, *Autochthone Islamische Aufklärung im 18. Jahrhundert* (Utrecht: M. Th. Houtsma Stichting, 2000); idem, “Sufism in the Eighteenth Century: An Attempt at a Provisional Appraisal,” *Die Welt des Islams* 36 (1996): 326–364; and R.S. O’Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint Ahmad Ibn Idris and the Idrisi Tradition* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> Examples include: Fazlur Rahman, “Revival and Reform in Islam,” in *the Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 2, ed. P.M. Holt et. al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 632–59; Reinhard Schulze, “Was Ist

die Islamische Aufklärung?," *Die Welt des Islams* 36 (1996): 276–325; and Jamal Malik, "Muslim Culture and Reform in Eighteenth Century South Asia," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 13 (2003): 227–43.

<sup>4</sup> The Muhammadan Way is a particular Shari'a-based trend within Sufism, which concentrates on the Prophet Muhammad and his tradition (*sunna*), and places emphasis on his spiritual presence and guidance, and the possibility of union with his ontological reality at the final stage of the mystical journey. This trend has constructed the theoretical basis for influential currents of Sufi reformism from the eighteenth century onwards, throughout India, North Africa and the Hijaz in the form of influential, mobile reformist Sufi orders, such as the Tijaniyya, Khalwatiyya, Idrisiyya and Sanusiyya. For a general survey of the notion of Muhammadan mysticism, see Mark Sedgwick, *Saints and Sons: The Making and Remaking of the Rashidi Ahmadi Sufi Order, 1799–2000* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 27–49; Fazlur Rahman, *Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago press, 1979), 193–212; and Zachary Valentine Wright, *On the Path of the Prophet: Shaykh Ahmad Tijani and the Tariqa Muhammadiyya* (Atlanta: African American Islamic Institute, 2005), 1–12 and 39–44.

<sup>5</sup> Among several scholars who have discussed these features, O'Fahey and Radtke have attempted to make a catalog of nine main characteristics of "neo-Sufi consensus" in their article, "Neo-Sufism Reconsidered," *Der Islam* 70/1 (1993): 52–87.

<sup>6</sup> The response to the doctrine of the Unity of Being in the Indian environment is meaningfully different from that in other Muslim territories such as Iran and Egypt. Contrary to the wide popularity of Ibn al-'Arabi in Anatolia and India, wherein his works were openly studied in the mosques, Egyptian society was certainly less tolerant of his ideas (Knysh, Alexander D., *Ibn 'Arabi in the Later Islamic Tradition: The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 204). Regarding Iran, the idea remained mainly among elites and did not penetrate into the sphere of masses as it happened in India.

<sup>7</sup> The only case of employing the term *waḥdat al-wujūd* by Ibn al-'Arabi occurs in his *Awṛād al-usbū'*. See Ibn al-'Arabi, "Wird," transl. Pablo Beneito and Stephen Hirstenstein, in *The Seven Days of the Heart, Prayers for the Nights and Days of the Week* (Oxford: Anqa Publishing, 2008), 57. For thoughtful accounts of Ibn al-'Arabi's Mystical philosophy, see Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of The Key Philosophical Concepts in Sufism and Taoism* (Tokyo: Keio Inst. of Cultural and Linguistic

Studies, 1966); Henry Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*, transl. from French by Ralph Manheim (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969); and William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn Al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989).

<sup>8</sup> It has been pointed out that the two perspectives must even be considered a basic pre-*kalām* problem. See H. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 32. For the debate on *tashbīh* and *tanzīh* in Islamic theology in general, see M. Abdel Haleem, "Early Kalam," in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. S. H. Nasr and O. Leaman (London: Routledge, 1996), 71–88.

<sup>9</sup> See Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism*, 41. For *tashbīh* and *tanzīh* in the context of Sufism, see Sachiko Murata and William C. Chittick, *The Vision of Islam* (New York: Paragon House, 1994); and Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 79–81.

<sup>10</sup> Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 81.

<sup>11</sup> Ibn al-'Arabi, *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, ed. O. Yahya, vol. I (Cairo: Al-Hay' al-Miṣriyya al-'Āmma lil-Kitāb, 1972), 118.

<sup>12</sup> Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 79. In this regard, Ibn al-'Arabi writes: "For the verifiers it has been established that there is nothing in Being/Existence but God. As for us (creatures), though we exist, our existence is through Him. He whose existence is through other than himself is in effect nonexistent" (Ibn al-'Arabi, *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. I, 279; translated in Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 94).

<sup>13</sup> Ibn al-'Arabi, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, ed. Abul-'Ala 'Afifi (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-'Arabi, 1946), 188.

<sup>14</sup> M. Chodkiewicz, "The Diffusion of Ibn 'Arabi's Doctrine," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society* 9 (1991): 51.

<sup>15</sup> Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, vol. II: *From Sixteenth Century to Modern Times*, (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1992), 36.

<sup>16</sup> Ballard, Roger, "Popular Islam in northern Pakistan and its reconstruction in urban Britain," in *Sufism in the West*, ed. Jamal Malik and John R. Hinnells (London: Routledge, 2006), 170.

<sup>17</sup> Carl W. Ernst and Bruce B. Lawrence, *Sufi Martyrs of Love: The Chishti Sufism in South Asia and Beyond* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 1.

<sup>18</sup> For Gangohi's advocating the Unity of Being and his work on the subject of unity entitled *Rushd-nama*, see I'jaz al-Haqq Quddusi, *Shaykh 'Abd al-*

*Quddus awr un ki ta'limat* (Karachi, Academy of Educational Research, 1961), 234–42 and 543–53; and Raziuddin Aquil, *Sufism Culture and Politics: Afghans and Islam in Medieval North India* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 2007), 221–28.

<sup>19</sup> Muhammad Umar, *Islam in Northern India during the Eighteenth Century* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1993), 2.

<sup>20</sup> Most of the disciples of Miyanmir such as Mulla Shah Qadiri Badakhshi, Shaykh Muhammad of Lahore, Mulla Khwaja Bihari, and Miyan Abul Ma'ali, also adhered to the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd*.

<sup>21</sup> Muhammad Salih Kambu Lahori, *'Amal-i Salih or Shahjahan Nama*, ed. Ghulam Yazdani, vol.III (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1939), 359.

<sup>22</sup> See Algar, Hamid, "Bâkî billâh," in *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, vol. IV, 542–3. On Naqshbandiyya as the proponents of the idea of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, see Algar, Hamid, "Reflections of Ibn 'Arabi in Early Naqshbandî Tradition," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society* 10 (1991).

<sup>23</sup> God's being deputy in human's disasters refers to a hadith according to which Prophet Muhammad said: "God will ask a person on the Day of Judgment (saying): 'O son of Adam, You saw me starving but you did not feed Me'. The person will say: 'My Lord, how could I feed Thee? Thou art the Lord of both worlds'. (God) will say: 'Didn't you know that my servant asked you for food but you did not feed him? If you had fed him you would have found Me through him'" (*Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, hadith no. 1172).

<sup>24</sup> Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam: India, 1200–1800* (London: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers, 2004), 92. Although Jahangir Simnani studied in his youth with 'Ala' al-Dawla Simnani (d.1336), famous for his critical views on Ibn al-'Arabi, he was not satisfied with 'Ala' al-Dawla and travelled to Kashan, in order to study under the commentator of Ibn al-'Arabi's teachings, Abdul Razzaq Kashani (Bruce B. Lawrence, *An Overview Of Sufi Literature in the Sultanate Period* (Patna: Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, 1979), 68). For more detail on Simnani and his works on unity, see Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, vol. I: *Early Sufism and its History in India to AD 1800* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1978), 268; and William C. Chittick, "Notes on Ibn al-'Arabi's Influence in the Subcontinent," *The Muslim World* 82/3–4 (1992): 223.

<sup>25</sup> The doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* had no difficulty in accommodating the various versions of unity found in Indian philosophy and mysticism, and it



found interesting parallels in Indian religions (Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam*, 91). The first religious formulation of the Unity of Being in the Indian context can be found in the Upanishads, a compilation of the teachings of Hindu Brahmins, and the Hindu theory of unity has been considered the reference point from which the reader may better understand the unitive theories of Being (Souad Hakim, "Unity of Being in Ibn 'Arabî, A Humanist Perspective," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society* 36 (2004); published online at <http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/articles/unityofbeing.html> (accessed October 05, 2013)). The similarities between Sufism and Hindu religious and philosophical traditions have been highlighted by some scholars, for instance Robert C. Zaehner in his *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism* (London: Athlone Press, 1960).

<sup>26</sup> See F. E. Keay, *Kabir and His Followers* (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1996), 130.

<sup>27</sup> J. S. Grewal, *Religious Movements and Institutions in Medieval India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 347.

<sup>28</sup> For the contribution of Chishti leaders to the construction of a shared tradition, see Carl W. Ernst and Bruce B. Lawrence, *Sufi Martyrs of Love: The Chishti Sufism in South Asia and Beyond* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 44.

<sup>29</sup> *Chilla-i ma'kûsa* is an ascetic exercise of forty-day worship, during which the ascetic's head is on the ground and his legs is tied to the roof or a tree branch.

<sup>30</sup> Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam*, 82.

<sup>31</sup> Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, vol. I: *Early Sufism and its History in India to AD 1800*, 335.

<sup>32</sup> Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam*, 89.

<sup>33</sup> This poetry is in the form of four-line stanzas, called *vakh*, and includes Lalla's reference to God as Shiva, thereby manifesting an identification of her perspective with Shaiva Tantra. The themes of Lalla's poetry consist of such topics as praise of the guru, the religious quest for unity, and reality of the divine self within. See Karen Pechilis, "Introduction: Hindu female Gurus in Historical and Philosophical Context," in *The Graceful Guru, Hindu Female Gurus in India and the United States*, ed. Karen Pechilis (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 20.

<sup>34</sup> Shaykh Nur al-Din and his disciples preferred the Shaivite Hindu term *rishi* in reference to themselves instead of Sufis. Stories of his spiritual attainments portray him as a preceptor of both the Muslims and Hindus.

See J.C. Heesterman, *India and Indonesia: General Perspectives* (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 42.

<sup>35</sup> Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, vol. II: *From Sixteenth Century to Modern Times*, 349–53. The existence of a cross fertilization of Sufism and Hindu culture hardly indicates that Sufis and Hindus experienced no conflict or hostility during their centuries of exposure to one another. According to Raziuddin Aquil, Sufi Shaykhs were often concerned about the yogi's "bad" influence on their disciples. For example, Farid al-Din Ganjshakar is reported to have asked Nizam al-Din Awliya not to take interest in the yogi's knowledge about the matters of worldly interest (Aquil, *Sufism Culture and Politics*, 217). For different views on the Sufi attitude towards the non-Muslim Indian, see Raziuddin Aquil, "Sufi Cults and Politics and Conversion: The Chishtis of the Sultanate Period," *Indian Historical Review* 22/1–2 (1995–6): 190; and K.A. Nizami, *Some Aspects of Religion and Politics in India during the 13th Century* (Aligarh: Muslim University, 1961), 177–8.

<sup>36</sup> See Simon Digby, "Qalanders and Related Groups: Element of Social Deviance in the Religious Life of the Delhi Sultanate of the 13th and 14th Centuries," in *Islam in Asia*, vol. I: *South Asia*, ed. Yohanan Friedmann (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Colorado: Westview Press, 1984), 60–108. For the development of heterodox Sufi orders in the larger world of Islam, see Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *God's Unruly Friends: Dervish Group in the Islamic Later Middle Period, 1200–1550* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994), 98–9.

<sup>37</sup> Concerning the adaptation of Hindu's style of worship and life, Mazhar Jan-i Janan remarks that Muslim women associated imaginary gods and goddesses with God and sought intercession from imaginary personalities in the time of hardship. For example, in order to ward an epidemic like small-pox off, they performed Hindu rituals associated with Sitla Devi (the goddess of small-pox) in order to gain her favor, and they observed many customs associated with the festival of Diwali. Like the Hindus, these women painted Jars and after filling them up with colored rice sent them to the houses of their daughters and sisters (Muhammad Na'imullah Bahraichi, *Ma'lūmāt-i Mazharī* (Kanpur, 1858–9), 38; quoted in: Nagendra Kumar Singh, *Islamic Mysticism in India* (New Delhi: AP.H. Publishing Corporation, 1996), 96). For more information on the adoption of Hindu rituals and styles of life and worship by Muslims, see Umar, *Islam in Northern India*, 415–47.

<sup>38</sup> Ahmad Sirhindi, *Maktūbāt-i Imām Rabbānī*, ed. Nur Muhammad, vol. I (Lahore: Nur Muhammad, 1964), 31, 102. For more detail regarding Sirhindi's viewpoint on unity, see Muhammad Abdul Haq Ansari, *Sufism and Shari'ah: A Study of Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi's Effort to Reform Sufism* (London: Islamic Foundation, 1986); and Yohanan Friedmann, *Shaykh Ahmad Sirhind: An Outline of His Thought and a Study of His Image in the Eyes of Posterity* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1971).

<sup>39</sup> Sirhindi, *Maktūbāt-i Imām Rabbānī*, vol. I, 13, 31, 36, 160, 269 and 291.

<sup>40</sup> Shah Waliullah, *The Conclusive Argument From God: Shah Wali Allah of Delhi's Hujjat Allah al-Baligha*, transl. Marcia K. Hermansen (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 185–9.

<sup>41</sup> Shah Waliullah, *Tafhīmāt-i Ilāhiyya*, vol. 1 (Hyderabad: Shah Waliullah Academy, 1973), 145.

<sup>42</sup> Ghulam Ali, Shah, *Maqāmāt-i Maẓharī: A Biography of Mirza Mazhar Jan-i Janan* (Delhi: Matba' Muṭṭabā'i, 1892), 99. *Rābita* means connection and attachment, and it is performed through leaving one's personality aside and becoming united with the personality of the Shaykh in order to establish a spiritual connection with him.

<sup>43</sup> Sirhindi, *Maktūbāt-i Imām Rabbānī*, vol. I, 222, 266, and 268.

<sup>44</sup> The following quotation from Mir Dard, for example, shows his opposition to the shared tradition: "Some Sufis claim to be real (*aṣl*), but adopt a posture similar to the heretics and unbelievers. They wear a girdle (*zunnār*) on their necks and bear sectarian mark on their foreheads...They consider such acts to be the climax of freedom (*āzādī*) and liberation from restraints (*bī qaydī*). They are not reluctant to utter words of blasphemy" (Mir Dard, *Ilm al-Kitāb* (Delhi: Matba' al-Ansari, 1890), 411–2).

<sup>45</sup> Mir Dard, *Ilm al-Kitāb*, 610–13. Mir Dard constructed his mystical system in the frame of *Tarīqa Muḥammadiyya Jāmi'a*, in order to reconcile two types of Sufism, i.e., ecstatic-unitive Sufism based on a *wujūdī* perspective and orthodox-oriented Sufism based on a *shuhūdī* perspective, which caused a serious rift among Indian Muslims from the sixteenth century onwards. This mystical theory was established by Mir Dard in the form of an intra-religious and intra-Sufi synthesis based on the ideas of his father, trying to advance a solution for the split between two trends within Sufism through proposing a way of balance and comprehensiveness that incorporated elements from both sides.

<sup>46</sup> Mir Dard, *‘Ilm al-Kitāb*, 613.

<sup>47</sup> Criticizing *waḥdat al-wujūd* in its pantheistic version of *hama ūst*, Mir Dard maintained that *waḥdat al-wujūd* is an expression in a drunken state by those who are in the state of being overwhelmed (*maghlūb-ḥālān*) at the beginning of their mystical path. According to him, this expression is uttered due to a deficiency of knowledge, and results in damaging many lay people. Mir Dard regarded this knowledge prevailing in his time under the title of the knowledge of *taṣawwuf* (i.e., *hama ūst*) as the main cause of infidelity. On the other side, he criticizes *waḥdat al-shuhūd* as the state of abundance of yearning (*kathrat-i shawq*) and being overwhelmed by rapture (*jadhba*), without understanding or attaining the knowledge that is beneficial for the majority of wayfarers. See Mir Dard, *‘Ilm al-Kitāb*, 6–7; and idem, *Chahār Risāla*, *Risāla-i Sham‘-i Maḥfīl* (Bhopal: Matba‘-i Shah jahani Bhopal, 1892), 283.